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MY LITTLE BOY

CARL EWALD

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MY LITTLE BOY

BOOKS BY THE SAME AUTHOR

PUBLISHED BY CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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MY LITTLE BOY

BY

CARL EWALD

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH

BY

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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Sole Authorized Translation

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

CARL EWALD, the author of this little book, was born in 1856 in the Duchy of Schleswig, where his father, himself a writer of historical and other novels, all widely read in their time, followed the occupation of a land-surveyor and owned a small farm. After the iniquitous war of 1864, when Schleswig was surrendered to Germany, the Ewald family refused to accept Prussian nationality and left for Elsinore, in Denmark, whence they eventually moved to settle at Copenhagen.

The son studied at the University, was for some years a forester and afterwards a schoolmaster. His first productions in literature were a long series of fairy-tales: *Two-Legs*, which the present publishers will issue after this volume, *The Quiet Pool*, *The Four Seasons*, and many others, which will now appear in their English version in rapid succession. Then came *My Little Boy* and a number of

psychological, half-mystical stories, such as *Pastor Jepsen's Christmas Eve* and *The Old Room*, of which an English translation is also to be published shortly. All these are marked by the same bright individuality of style, combined with a simplicity of expression and narrative that gives them a charm which is all their own. And I can but hope that not too much of this has been lost in the translating.

The hero of *My Little Boy* is now a growing lad of thirteen and has four little sisters to keep him company. All that Carl Ewald has written about children in this book and elsewhere is the fruit of his personal knowledge and observation of his own children and those of others. So too his experience of forestry has stood him in the rarest stead when writing of beasts and birds and fishes, of trees and flowers, of the seasons and the wind and the mist.

For the rest, Carl Ewald was educated and grew up in a household where piety and conservatism reigned so supreme that, from sheer despair, he lapsed gradually into a radicalism which, perhaps for that very rea-

son, became stronger than that of most of his contemporaries, "and for which," he writes to me "there is but little room in Denmark." He does not belong and has never belonged to any literary school or clique, but he "loves Georg Brandes," to quote his own words again, "as the man who brought new life into Danish literature and whose whole personality and sphere of activity have meant so much to me in my career."

A. T. DE M.

LONDON, ENGLAND,
St. Patrick's Day, 1906.

MY LITTLE BOY

CHAPTER I

MY little boy is beginning to live.

Carefully, stumbling now and then on his little knock-kneed legs, he makes his way over the paving-stones, looks at everything that there is to look at and bites at every apple, both those which are his due and those which are forbidden him.

He is not a pretty child and is the more likely to grow into a fine lad. But he is charming.

His face can light up suddenly and become radiant; and he can look at you with quite cold eyes. He has a strong intuition and he is incorrupt-

ible. He has never yet bartered a kiss for barley-sugar. There are people whom he likes and people whom he dislikes. There is one who has long courted his favour indefatigably and in vain; and, the other day, he formed a close friendship with another who had not so much as said "Good-day" to him before he had crept into her lap and nestled there with glowing resolution.

He has a habit which I love.

When we are walking together and there is anything that impresses him, he lets go my hand for a moment. Then, when he has investigated the phenomenon and arrived at a result, I feel his little fist in mine again.

He has bad habits too.

He is apt, for instance, suddenly and without the slightest reason, to

go up to people whom he meets in the street and hit them with his little stick. What is in his mind, when he does so, I do not know; and, so long as he does not hit me, it remains a matter between himself and the people concerned.

He has an odd trick of seizing big words in a grown-up conversation, storing them up for a while and then asking me for an explanation:

"Father," he says, "what is life?"

I give him a tap in his little stomach, roll him over on the carpet and conceal my emotion under a mighty romp. Then, when we sit breathless and tired, I answer, gravely:

"Life is delightful, my little boy. Don't you be afraid of it!"

CHAPTER II

TO-DAY my little boy gave me my first lesson.

It was in the garden.

I was writing in the shade of the big chestnut-tree, close to where the brook flows past. He was sitting a little way off, on the grass, in the sun, with Hans Christian Andersen in his lap.

Of course, he does not know how to read, but he lets you read to him, likes to hear the same tales over and over again. The better he knows them, the better he is pleased. He follows the story page by page, knows exactly where everything

comes and catches you up immediately should you skip a line.

There are two tales which he loves more than anything in the world.

These are Grimm's *Faithful John* and Andersen's *The Little Mermaid.* When any one comes whom he likes, he fetches the big Grimm, with those heaps of pictures, and asks for *Faithful John.* Then, if the reader stops, because it is so terribly sad, with all those little dead children, a bright smile lights up his small, long face and he says, reassuringly and pleased at "knowing better:"

"Yes, but they come to life again."

To-day, however, it is *The Little Mermaid.*

"Is that the sort of stories you write?" he asks.

"Yes," I say, "but I am afraid mine will not be so pretty."

"You must take pains," he says.

And I promise.

For a time he makes no sound. I go on writing and forget about him.

"Is there a little mermaid down there, in the water?" he asks.

"Yes, she swims up to the top in the summer."

He nods and looks out across the brook, which ripples so softly and smoothly that one can hardly see the water flow. On the opposite side, the rushes grow green and thick and there is also a bird, hidden in the rushes, which sings. The dragon-flies are whirling and humming. I am sitting with my head in my hand, absorbed in my work.

Suddenly, I hear a splash.

I jump from my chair, upset the table, dart forward and see that my little boy is gone. The brook is billowing and foaming; there are wide circles on the surface.

In a moment, I am in the water and find him and catch hold of him.

He stands on the grass, dripping with wet, spluttering and coughing. His thin clothes are clinging to his thin body, his face is black with mud. But out of the mud gleams a pair of angry eyes:

"There was no mermaid," he says.

I do not at once know what to reply and I have no time to think.

"Do you write that sort of stories?" he asks.

"Yes," I say, shamefaced.

"I don't like any of you," he says. "You make fun of a little boy."

He turns his back on me and, proud and wet, goes indoors without once looking round.

This evening, Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen disappear in a mysterious manner, which is never explained. He will miss them greatly, at first; but he will never be fooled again, not if I were to give him the sun and moon in his hand.

CHAPTER III

MY little boy and I have had an exceedingly interesting walk in the Frederiksberg Park.

There was a mouse, which was irresistible. There were two chaffinches, husband and wife, which built their nest right before our eyes, and a snail, which had no secrets for us. And there were flowers, yellow and white, and there were green leaves, which told us the oddest adventures: in fact, as much as we can find room for in our little head.

Now we are sitting on a bench and digesting our impressions.

Suddenly the air is shaken by a tremendous roar:

"What was that?" asks my little boy.

"That was the lion in the Zoological Gardens," I reply.

No sooner have I said this than I curse my own stupidity.

I might have said that it was a gunshot announcing the birth of a prince; or an earthquake; or a china dish falling from the sky and breaking into pieces: anything whatever, rather than the truth.

For now my little boy wants to know what sort of thing the Zoological Gardens is.

I tell him.

The Zoological Gardens is a horrid place, where they lock up wild beasts who have done no wrong and who are accustomed to walk about freely in

the distant foreign countries where they come from. The lion is there, whom we have just heard roaring. He is so strong that he can kill a policeman with one blow of his paw; he has great, haughty eyes and awfully sharp teeth. He lives in Africa and, at night, when he roars, all the other beasts tremble in their holes for fear. He is called the king of beasts. They caught him one day in a cunning trap and bound him and dragged him here and locked him up in a cage with iron bars to it. The cage is no more than half as big as Petrine's room. And there the king walks up and down, up and down, and gnashes his teeth with sorrow and rage and roars so that you can hear him ever so far away. Outside his cage stand cowardly people and

laugh at him, because he can't get out and eat them up, and poke their sticks through the rails and tease him.

My little boy stands in front of me and looks at me with wide-open eyes:

"Would he eat them up, if he got out?" he asks.

"In a moment."

"But he can't get out, can he?"

"No. That's awfully sad. He can't get out."

"Father, let us go and look at the lion."

I pretend not to hear and go on to tell him of the strange birds there: great eagles, which used to fly over every church-steeple and over the highest trees and mountains and swoop down upon lambs and hares and carry them up to their young in the nest. Now they are sitting in

cages, on a perch, like canaries, with clipped wings and blind eyes. I tell him of gulls, which used to fly all day long over the stormy sea: now they splash about in a puddle of water, screaming pitifully. I tell him of wonderful blue and red birds, which, in their youth, used to live among wonderful blue and red flowers, in balmy forests a thousand times bigger than the Frederiksberg Park, where it was as dark as night under the trees with the brightest sun shining down upon the tree-tops: now they sit there in very small cages and hang their beaks while they stare at tiresome boys in dark-blue suits and black stockings and waterproof boots and sailor-hats.

"Are those birds really blue?" asks my little boy.

"Sky-blue," I answer. "And utterly broken-hearted."

"Father, can't we go and look at the birds?"

I take my little boy's hands in mine:

"I don't think we will," I say. "Why should still more silly boys do so? You can't imagine how it goes to one's heart to look at those poor captive beasts."

"Father, I should so much like to go."

"Take my advice and don't. The animals there are not the real animals, you see. They are ill and ugly and angry because of their captivity and their longing and their pain."

"I should so much like to see them."

"Now let me tell you something. To go to the Zoological Gardens costs five cents for you and ten cents for

me. That makes fifteen cents altogether, which is an awful lot of money. We won't go there now, but we'll buy the biggest money-box we can find: one of those money-boxes shaped like a pig. Then we'll put fifteen cents in it. And every Thursday we'll put fifteen cents in the pig. By-and-by, that will grow into quite a fortune: it will make such a lot of money that, when you are grown up, you can take a trip to Africa and go to the desert and hear the wild, the real lion roaring and tremble just like the people tremble down there. And you can go to the great, dark forests and see the real blue birds flying proud and free among the flowers. You can't think how glad you will be, how beautiful they will look and how they will sing to you. . . ."

"Father, I would rather go to the Zoological Gardens now."

My little boy does not understand a word of what I say. And I am at my wits' end.

"Shall we go and have some cakes at Josty's?" I ask.

"I would rather go to the Zoological Gardens."

I can read in his eyes that he is thinking of the captive lion. Ugly human instincts are waking up in his soul. The mouse is forgotten and the snail; and the chaffinches have built their nest to no purpose.

At last I get up and say, bluntly, without any further explanation:

"You are *not* going to the Zoological Gardens. Now we'll go home."

And home we go. But we are not in a good temper.

Of course, I get over it and I buy an enormous money-box pig. Also we put the money into it and he thinks that most interesting.

But, later in the afternoon, I find him in the bed-room engaged in a piteous game.

He has built a cage, in which he has imprisoned the pig. He is teasing it and hitting it with his whip, while he keeps shouting to it:

"You can't get out and bite me, you stupid pig! You can't get out!"

CHAPTER IV

WE have beer-soup and Aunt Anna to dinner. Now beer-soup is a nasty dish and Aunt Anna is not very nice either.

She has yellow teeth and a little hump and very severe eyes, which are not even both equally severe. She is nearly always scolding us and, when she sees a chance, she pinches us.

The worst of all, however, is that she is constantly setting us a good example, which can easily end by gradually and inevitably driving us to embrace wickedness.

Aunt Anna does not like beer-soup any more than we do. But of course

she eats it with a voluptuous expression on her face and looks angrily at my little boy, who does not even make an attempt to behave nicely:

"Why doesn't the little boy eat his delicious beer-soup?" she asks.

A scornful silence.

"Such delicious beer-soup! I know a poor, wretched boy who would be awfully glad to have such delicious beer-soup."

My little boy looks with great interest at Auntie, who is swallowing her soup with eyes full of ecstatic bliss:

"Where is he?" he asks.

Aunt Anna pretends not to hear.

"Where is the poor boy?" he asks again.

"Yes, where is he?" I ask. "What's his name?"

Aunt Anna gives me a furious glance.

"What's his name, Aunt Anna?" asks my little boy. "Where does he live? He can have my beer-soup with pleasure."

"Mine too," I say, resolutely, and I push my plate from me.

My little boy never takes his great eyes off Aunt Anna's face. Meanwhile, she has recovered herself:

"There are many poor boys who would thank God if they could get such delicious beer-soup," she says. "Very many. Everywhere."

"Yes, but tell us of one, Auntie," I say.

My little boy has slipped down from his chair. He stands with his chin just above the table and both his hands round his plate, ready to march off

with the beer-soup to the poor boy, if only he can get his address.

But Aunt Anna does not allow herself to be played with:

"Heaps of poor boys," she says again. "Hun-dreds! And therefore another little boy, whom I will not name, but who is in this room, ought to be ashamed that he is not thankful for his beer-soup."

My little boy stares at Aunt Anna like the bird fascinated by the snake.

"Such delicious beer-soup!" she says. "I must really ask for another little helping."

Aunt Anna revels in her martyrdom. My little boy stands speechless, with open mouth and round eyes.

I push my chair back and say, with genuine exasperation:

"Now, look here, Aunt Anna, this is really too bad! Here we are, with a whole lot of beer-soup, which we don't care about in the least and which we would be very glad to get rid of, if we only knew some one who would have it. You are the only one that knows of anybody. You know a poor boy who would dance for joy if he got some beer-soup. You know hundreds. But you won't tell us their names or where they live."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"And you yourself sit quite calmly eating two whole helpings, though you know quite well that you're going to have an omelette to follow. That's really very naughty of you, Aunt Anna."

Aunt Anna chokes with annoyance. My little boy locks his teeth with a

snap and looks with every mark of disgust at that wicked old woman.

And I turn with calm earnestness to his mother and say:

"After this, it would be most improper for us ever to have beer-soup here again. We don't care for it and there are hundreds of little boys who love it. If it must be made, then Aunt Anna must come every Saturday and fetch it. She knows where the boys live."

The omelette is eaten in silence, after which Aunt Anna shakes the dust from her shoes. She won't have any coffee to-day.

While she is standing in the hall and putting on her endless wraps, a last doubt arises in my little boy's soul. He opens his green eyes wide before her face and whispers:

"Aunt Anna, where do the boys live?"

Aunt Anna pinches him and is shocked and goes off, having suffered a greater defeat than she can ever repair.

CHAPTER V

MY little boy comes into my room and tells me, with a very long face, that Jean is dead. And we put all nonsense on one side and hurry away to the Klampenborg train, to go where Jean is.

For Jean is the biggest dog that has lived for some time.

He once bit a boy so hard that the boy still walks lame. He once bit his own master. He could give such a look out of his eyes and open such a mouth that there was no more horrible sight in the world. And then he would be the mildest of the mild: my little boy could put his hand in his

mouth and ride on his back and pull his tail.

When we get there, we hear that Jean is already buried.

We look at each other in dismay, to think how quickly that happens! And we go to the grave, which is in the grounds of the factory, where the tall chimneys stand.

We sit down and can't understand it.

We tell each other all the stories that we know of Jean's wonderful size and strength. The one remembers this, the other that. And, as each story is told, the whole thing becomes only more awful and obscure.

At last we go home by train.

Besides ourselves, there is a kind old gentleman in the compartment, who would like to make friends with my

little boy. But the boy has nothing to talk about to the kind old gentleman. He stands at the window, which comes just under his chin, and stares out.

His eyes light upon some tall chimneys:

"That's where Jean is buried," he says.

"Yes."

The landscape flies past. He can think only of *that* and see only *that* and, when some more chimneys appear, he says again:

"That's where Jean is buried."

"No, my little friend," says the kind old gentleman. "That was over there."

The boy looks at him with surprise. I hasten to reassure him:

"Those *are* Jean's chimneys," I say.

And, while he is looking out again, I take the old gentleman to the further corner of the compartment and tell him the state of the case.

I tell him that, if I live, I hope, in years to come, to explain to the boy the difference between Petersen's and Hansen's factories and, should I die, I will confidently leave that part of his education to others. Yes, even if he should never learn this difference, I would still be resigned. Today it is a question of other and more important matters. The strongest, the most living thing he knew is dead. . . .

"Really?" says the old gentleman, sympathetically. "A relation, perhaps?"

"Yes," I say. "Jean is dead, a dog. . . ."

"A dog?"

"It is not because of the *dog*—don't you understand?—but of *death*, which he sees for the first time: death, with all its might, its mystery. . . ."

"Father," says my little boy and turns his head towards us. "When do we die?"

"When we grow old," says the kind old gentleman.

"No," says the boy. "Einar has a brother, at home, in the courtyard, and he is dead. And he was only a little boy."

"Then Einar's brother was so good and learnt such a lot that he was already fit to go to Heaven," says the old gentleman.

"Mind you don't become too good," I say and laugh and tap my little boy in the stomach.

And my little boy laughs too and goes back to his window, where new chimneys rise over Jean's grave.

But I take the old gentleman by the shoulders and forbid him most strictly to talk to my little boy again. I give up trying to make him understand me. I just shake him. He eyes the communication-cord and, when we reach the station, hurries away.

I go with my little boy, holding his hand, through the streets full of live people. In the evening, I sit on the edge of his bed and talk with him about that incomprehensible thing: Jean, who is dead; Jean, who was so much alive, so strong, so big. . . .

CHAPTER VI

OUR courtyard is full of children and my little boy has picked a bosom-friend out of the band: his name is Einar and he can be as good as another.

My little boy admires him and Einar allows himself to be admired, so that the friendship is established on the only proper basis.

"Einar says . . . Einar thinks . . . Einar does," is the daily refrain; and we arrange our little life accordingly.

"I can't see anything out of the way in Einar," says the mother of my little boy.

"Nor can I," say I. "But our little

boy can and that is enough. I once had a friend who could see nothing at all charming in you. And you yourself, if I remember right, had three friends who thought *your* taste inexcusable. Luckily for our little boy. . . ."

"Luckily!"

"It is the feeling that counts," I go on lecturing, "and not the object."

"Thanks!" she says.

Now something big and unusual takes place in our courtyard and makes an extraordinary impression on the children and gives their small brains heaps to struggle with for many a long day.

The scarlatina comes.

And scarlatina is not like a pain in your stomach, when you have eaten too many pears, or like a cold, when

you have forgotten to put on your jacket. Scarlatina is something quite different, something powerful and terrible. It comes at night and takes a little boy who was playing quite happily that same evening. And then the little boy is gone.

Perhaps a funny carriage comes driving in through the gate, with two horses and a coachman and two men with bright brass buttons on their coats. The two men take out of the carriage a basket, with a red blanket and white sheets, and carry it up to where the boy lives. Presently, they carry the basket down again and then the boy is inside. But nobody can see him, because the sheet is over his face. The basket is shoved into the carriage, which is shut with a bang, and away goes the carriage

with the boy, while his mother dries her eyes and goes up to the others.

Perhaps no carriage comes. But then the sick boy is shut up in his room and no one may go to him for a long time, because he is infectious. And any one can understand that this must be terribly sad.

The children in the courtyard talk of nothing else.

They talk with soft voices and faces full of mystery, because they know nothing for certain. They hear that one of them, who rode away in the carriage, is dead; but that makes no more impression on them than when one of them falls ill and disappears.

Day by day, the little band is being thinned out and not one of them has yet come back.

I stand at my open window and look

at my little boy, who is sitting on the steps below with his friend. They have their arms around each other's necks and see no one except each other; that is to say, Einar sees himself and my little boy sees Einar.

"If you fall ill, I will come and see you," says my little boy.

"No, you won't!"

"I will come and see you."

His eyes beam at this important promise. Einar cries as though he were already ill.

And the next day he is ill.

He lies in a little room all by himself. No one is allowed to go to him. A red curtain hangs before the window.

My little boy sits alone on the steps outside and stares up at the curtain. His hands are thrust deep into his

pockets. He does not care to play and he speaks to nobody.

And I walk up and down the room, uneasy as to what will come next.

"You are anxious about our little boy," says his mother. "And it will be a miracle if he escapes."

"It's not that. We've all had a touch of scarlatina."

But just as I want to talk to her about it, I hear a fumbling with the door-handle which there is no mistaking and then he stands before us in the room.

I know you so well, my little boy, when you come in sideways like that, with a long face, and go and sit in a corner and look at the two people who owe so much happiness to you—look from one to the other. Your eyes are greener than usual. You can't find

your words and you sit huddled up and you are ever so good.

"Mother, is Einar ill?"

"Yes. But he will soon be better again. The doctor says that he is not so bad."

"Is he infectious, Mother?"

"Yes, he is. His little sister has been sent to the country, so that she may not fall ill too. No one is allowed to go to him except his mother, who gives him his milk and his medicine and makes his bed."

A silence.

The mother of my little boy looks down at her book and suspects nothing. The father of my little boy looks in great suspense from the window.

"Mother, I want to go to Einar."

"You can't go there, my little man.

You hear, he's infectious. Just think, if you should fall ill yourself! Einar isn't bothering at all about chatting with you. He sleeps the whole day long."

"But when he wakes, Mother?"

"You can't go up there."

This tells upon him and he is nearly crying. I see that the time has come for me to come to his rescue:

"Have you promised Einar to go and see him?" I ask.

"Yes, Father. . . ."

He is over his trouble. His eyes beam. He stands erect and glad beside me and puts his little hand in mine.

"Then of course you must do so," I say, calmly. "So soon as he wakes."

Our mother closes her book with a bang:

"Go down to the courtyard and play, while Father and I have a talk."

The boy runs away.

And she comes up to me and lays her hand on my shoulder and says, earnestly:

"I *daren't* do that, do you hear?"

And I take her hand and kiss it and say, quite as earnestly:

"And I *daren't refuse!*"

We look at each other, we two, who share the empire, the power and the glory.

"I heard our little boy make his promise," I say, "I saw him. Sir Galahad himself was not more in earnest when swearing his knightly oath. You see, we have no choice here. He can catch the scarlatina in any case and it is not even certain that he will catch it. . . ."

"If it was diphtheria, you wouldn't talk like that!"

"You may be right. But am I to become a thief for the sake of a nickel, because I am not sure that I could resist the temptation to steal a kingdom?"

"You would not find a living being to agree with you."

"Except yourself. And that is all I want. The infection is really only a side matter. It can come this way or that way. We can't safeguard him, come what may. . . ."

"But are we to send him straight to where it is?"

"We're not doing that; it's not we who are doing that."

She is very much excited. I put my arm round her waist and we walk up and down the room together:

"Darling, to-day our little boy may meet with a great misfortune. He may receive a shock from which he will never recover. . . ."

"That is true," she says.

"If he doesn't keep his promise, the misfortune has occurred. It would already be a misfortune if he could ever think that it was possible for him to break it, if it appeared to him that there was anything great or remarkable about keeping it."

"Yes, but. . . ."

"Darling, the world is full of careful persons. One step more and they become mere paltry people. Shall we turn that into a likely thing, into a virtue, for our little boy? His promise was stupid: let that pass. . . ."

"He is so little."

"Yes, that he is; and God be praised

for it! Think what good luck it is that he did not know the danger, when he made his promise, that he does not understand it now, when he is keeping it. What a lucky beggar! He is learning to keep his word, just as he has learnt to be clean. By the time that he is big enough to know his danger, it will be an indispensable habit with him. And he gains all that at the risk of a little scarlatina."

She lays her head on my shoulder and says nothing more.

That afternoon, she takes our little boy by the hand and goes up with him to Einar. They stand on the threshold of his room, bid him good-day and ask him how he is.

Einar is not at all well and does not look up and does not answer.

But that does not matter in the least.

CHAPTER VII

MY little boy is given a cent by Petrine with instructions to go to the baker's and buy some biscuits.

By that which fools call an accident, but which is really a divine miracle, if miracles there be, I overhear this instruction. Then I stand at my window and see him cross the street in his slow way and with bent head; only, he goes slower than usual and with his head bent more deeply between his small shoulders.

He stands long outside the baker's window, where there is a confused heap of lollipops and chocolates and sugar-sticks and other things created for a small boy's delight. Then he

lifts his young hand, opens the door, disappears and presently returns with a great paper bag, eating with all his might.

And I, who, Heaven be praised, have myself been a thief in my time, run all over the house and give my orders.

My little boy enters the kitchen.

"Put the biscuits on the table," says Petrine.

He stands still for a moment and looks at her and at the table and at the floor. Then he goes silently to his mother.

"You're quite a big boy now, that you can buy biscuits for Petrine," says she, without looking up from her work.

His face is very long, but he says nothing. He comes quietly in to me

and sits down on the edge of a chair.

"You have been over the way, at the baker's."

He comes up to me, where I am sitting and reading, and presses himself against me. I do not look at him, but I can perceive what is going on inside him.

"What did you buy at the baker's?"

"Lollipops."

"Well, I never! What fun! Why, you had some lollipops this morning. Who gave you the money this time?"

"Petrine."

"Really! Well, Petrine is certainly very fond of you. Do you remember the lovely ball she gave you on your birthday?"

"Father, Petrine told me to buy a cent's worth of biscuits."

"Oh dear!"

It is very quiet in the room. My little boy cries bitterly and I look anxiously before me, stroking his hair the while.

"Now you have fooled Petrine badly. She wants those biscuits, of course, for her cooking. She thinks they're on the kitchen-table and, when she goes to look, she won't find any. Mother gave her a cent for biscuits. Petrine gave you a cent for biscuits and you go and spend it on lollipops. What are we to do?"

He looks at me in despair, holds me tight, says a thousand things without speaking a word.

"If only we had a cent," I say. "Then you could rush over the way and fetch the biscuits."

"Father. . . ." His eyes open very

wide and he speaks so softly that I can hardly hear him. "There is a cent on mother's writing-table."

"Is there?" I cry with delight. But, at the same moment, I shake my head and my face is overcast again. "That is no use to us, my little boy. That cent belongs to mother. The other was Petrine's. People are so terribly fond of their money and get so angry when you take it from them. I can understand that, for you can buy such an awful lot of things with money. You can get biscuits and lollipops and clothes and toys and half the things in the world. And it is not so easy either to make money. Most people have to drudge all day long to earn as much as they want. So it is no wonder that they get angry when

you take it. Especially when it is only for lollipops. Now Petrine . . . she has to spend the whole day cleaning rooms and cooking dinner and washing up before she gets her wages. And out of that she has to buy clothes and shoes . . . and you know that she has a little girl whom she has to pay for at Madam Olsen's. She must certainly have saved very cleverly before she managed to buy you that ball."

We walk up and down the room, hand in hand. He keeps on falling over his legs, for he can't take his eyes from my face.

"Father . . . haven't you got a cent?"

I shake my head and give him my purse:

"Look for yourself," I say. "There's

not a cent in it. I spent the last this morning."

We walk up and down. We sit down and get up and walk about again. We are very gloomy. We are bowed down with sorrow and look at each other in great perplexity.

"There might be one hidden away in a drawer somewhere," I say.

We fly to the drawers.

We pull out thirty drawers and rummage through them. We fling papers in disorder, higgledy-piggledy, on the floor: what do we care? If only, if only we find a cent. . . .

Hurrah!

We both, at last, grasp at a cent, as though we would fight for it . . . we have found a beautiful, large cent. Our eyes gleam and we laugh through our tears.

"Hurry now," I whisper. "You can go this way . . . through my door. Then run back quickly up the kitchen stairs, with the biscuits, and put them on the table. I shall call Petrine, so that she doesn't see. And we won't tell anybody."

He is down the stairs before I have done speaking. I run after him and call to him:

"Wasn't it a splendid thing that we found that cent?" I say.

"Yes," he answers, earnestly.

And he laughs for happiness and I laugh too and his legs go like drumsticks across to the baker's.

From my window, I see him come back, at the same pace, with red cheeks and glad eyes. He has committed his first crime. He has understood it. And he has not the sting of

remorse in his soul nor the black cockade of forgiveness in his cap.

The mother of my little boy and I sit until late at night talking about money, which seems to us the most difficult matter of all.

For our little boy must learn to know the power of money and the glamour of money and the joy of money. He must earn much money and spend much money. . . .

Yet there were two people, yesterday, who killed a man to rob him of four dollars and thirty-seven cents. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

IT has been decreed in the privy council that my little boy shall have a weekly income of one cent. Every Sunday morning, that sum shall be paid to him, free of income-tax, out of the treasury and he has leave to dispose of it entirely at his own pleasure.

He receives this announcement with composure and sits apart for a while and ponders on it.

"Every Sunday?" he asks.

"Every Sunday."

"All the time till the summer holidays?"

"All the time till the summer holidays."

In the summer holidays, he is to go to the country, to stay with his godmother, in whose house he was pleased to allow himself to be born. The summer holidays are, consequently, the limits of his calculation of time: beyond them lies, for the moment, his Nirvana.

And we employ this restricted horizon of ours to further our true happiness.

That is to say, we calculate, with the aid of the almanac, that, if everything goes as heretofore, there will be fifteen Sundays before the summer holidays. We arrange a drawer with fifteen compartments and in each compartment we put one cent. Thus we know exactly what we have and are able at any time to survey our financial status.

And, when he sees that great lot of cents lying there, my little boy's breast is filled with mad delight. He feels endlessly rich, safe for a long time. The courtyard rings with his bragging, with all that he is going to do with his money. His special favourites are invited to come up and view his treasure.

The first Sunday passes in a normal fashion, as was to be expected.

He takes his cent and turns it straightway into a stick of chocolate of the best sort, with almonds on it and sugar, in short, an ideal stick in every way. The whole performance is over in five minutes: by that time, the stick of chocolate is gone, with the sole exception of a remnant in the corners of our mouth, which our ruthless mother wipes away, and a

stain on our collar, which annoys us.

He sits by me, with a vacant little face, and swings his legs. I open the drawer and look at the empty space and at the fourteen others:

"So *that's* gone," I say.

My accent betrays a certain melancholy, which finds an echo in his breast. But he does not deliver himself of it at once.

"Father . . . is it long till next Sunday?"

"Very long, my boy; ever so many days."

We sit a little, steeped in our own thoughts. Then I say, pensively:

"Now, if you had bought a top, you would perhaps have had more pleasure out of it. I know a place where

there is a lovely top: red, with a green ring round it. It is just over the way, in the toy-shop. I saw it yesterday. I should be greatly mistaken if the toy-man was not willing to sell it for a cent. And you've got a whip, you know."

We go over the way and look at the top in the shop-window. It is really a splendid top.

"The shop's shut," says my little boy, despondently.

I look at him with surprise:

"Yes, but what does that matter to us? Anyway, we can't buy the top before next Sunday. You see, you've spent your cent on chocolate. Give me your handkerchief: there's still a bit on your cheek."

There is no more to be said. Crest-fallen and pensively, we go home.

We sit a long time at the dining-room window, from which we can see the window of the shop.

During the course of the week, we look at the top daily, for it does not do to let one's love grow cold. One might so easily forget it. And the top shines always more seductively. We go in and make sure that the price is really in keeping with our means. We make the shopkeeper take a solemn oath to keep the top for us till Sunday morning, even if boys should come and bid him much higher sums for it.

On Sunday morning, we are on the spot before nine o'clock and acquire our treasure with trembling hands. And we play with it all day and sleep with it at night, until, on Wednesday morning, it disappears without a

trace, after the nasty manner which tops have.

When the turn comes of the next cent, something remarkable happens.

There is a boy in the courtyard who has a skipping-rope and my little boy, therefore, wants to have a skipping-rope too. But this is a difficult matter. Careful enquiries establish the fact that a skipping-rope of the sort used by the upper classes is nowhere to be obtained for less than five cents.

The business is discussed as early as Saturday:

"It's the simplest thing in the world," I say. "You must not spend your cent to-morrow. Next Sunday you must do the same and the next and the next. On the Sunday after

that, you will have saved your five cents and can buy your skipping-rope at once."

"When shall I get my skipping-rope then?"

"In five Sundays from now."

He says nothing, but I can see that he does not think my idea very brilliant. In the course of the day, he derives, from sources unknown to me, an acquaintance with financial circumstances which he serves up to me on Sunday morning in the following words:

"Father, you must lend me five cents for the skipping-rope. If you will lend me five cents for the skipping-rope, I'll give you *forty* cents back. . . ."

He stands close to me, very red in the face and quite confused. I per-

ceive that he is ripe for falling into the claws of the usurers:

"I don't do that sort of business, my boy," I say. "It wouldn't do you any good either. And you're not even in a position to do it, for you have only thirteen cents, as you know."

He collapses like one whose last hope is gone.

"Let us just see," I say.

And we go to our drawer and stare at it long and deeply.

"We might perhaps manage it this way, that I give you five cents now. And then I should have your cent and the next four cents. . . ."

He interrupts me with a loud shout. I take out my purse, give him five cents and take one cent out of the drawer:

"That won't be pleasant next Sun-

day," I say, "and the next and the next and the next. . . ."

But the thoughtless youth is gone.

Of course, the instalments of his debt are paid off with great ceremony. He is always on the spot himself when the drawer is opened and sees how the requisite cent is removed and finds its way into my pocket instead of his.

The first time, all goes well. It is simply an amusing thing that I should have the cent; and the skipping-rope is still fresh in his memory, because of the pangs which he underwent before its purchase. Next Sunday, already the thing is not *quite* so pleasant and, when the fourth instalment falls due, my little boy's face looks very gloomy:

"Is anything the matter?" I ask.

"I should so much like a stick of chocolate," he says, without looking at me.

"Is that all? You can get one in a fortnight. By that time, you will have paid for the skipping-rope and the cent will be your own again."

"I should so much like to have the stick of chocolate now."

Of course, I am full of the sincerest compassion, but I can't help it. What's gone is gone. We saw it with our own eyes and we know exactly where it has gone to. And, that Sunday morning, we part in a dejected mood.

Later in the day, however, I find him standing over the drawer with raised eyebrows and a pursed-up mouth. I sit down quietly and wait.

And I do not have to wait long before I learn that his development as an economist is taking quite its normal course.

"Father, suppose we moved the cent now from here into this Sunday's place and I took it and bought the chocolate-stick. . . ."

"Why, then you won't have your cent for the other Sunday."

"I don't mind that, Father. . . ."

We talk about it, and then we do it. And, with that, as a matter of course, we enter upon the most reckless peculations.

The very next Sunday, he is clever enough to take the furthest cent, which lies just before the summer holidays. He pursues the path of vice without a scruple, until, at last, the blow falls and five long Sundays come

in a row without the least chance of a cent.

Where should they come from? They were there. We know that. They are gone. We have spent them ourselves.

But, during those drab days of poverty, we sit every morning over the empty drawer and talk long and profoundly about that painful phenomenon, which is so simple and so easy to understand and which one must needs make the best of.

And we hope and trust that our experience will do us good, when, after our trip, we start a new set of cents.

CHAPTER IX

MY little boy is engaged to be married.

She is a big, large-limbed young woman, three years his senior, and no doubt belongs to the minor aristocracy. Her name is Gertie. By a misunderstanding, however, which is pardonable at his age and moreover quite explained by Gertie's appearance, he calls her Dirty—little Dirty—and by this name she will be handed down to history.

He met her on the boulevard, where he was playing, in the fine spring weather, with other children. His reason for the engagement is good enough:

"I wanted a girl for myself," he says.

Either I know very little of mankind or he has made a fortunate choice. No one is likely to take Dirty from him.

Like the gentleman that he is, he at once brings the girl home to us and introduces her. In consequence of the formality of the occasion, he does not go in by the kitchen way, as usual, but rings the front-door bell. I open the door myself. There he stands on the mat, hand in hand with Dirty, his bride, and, with radiant eyes:

"Father," he says, "this is little Dirty. She is my sweetheart. We are going to be married."

"That is what people usually do with their sweethearts," I answer,

philosophically. "Pray, Dirty, come in and be welcomed by the family."

"Wipe your feet, Dirty," says my little boy.

The mother of my little boy does not think much of the match. She has even spoken of forbidding Dirty the house.

"We can't do that," I say. "I am not in ecstasies over it either, but it is not at all certain that it will last."

"Yes, but . . ."

"Do you remember what little use it was when your mother forbade me the house? We used to meet in the most incredible places and kiss each other terribly. I can quite understand that you have forgotten, but you ought to bear it in mind now that your son's beginning. And you ought to value

the loyalty of his behaviour towards his aged parents."

"My dear! . . ."

"And then I must remind you that it is spring. The trees are budding. You can't see it, perhaps, from the kitchen-window or from your work-table, but I, who go about all day, have noticed it. You know what Byron says:

March has its hares, and May must have its heroine."

And so Dirty is accepted.

But, when she calls, she has first to undergo a short quarantine, while the mother of my little boy washes her and combs her hair thoroughly.

Dirty does not like this, but the boy does. He looks on with extraordinary interest and at once complains if there

is a place that has escaped the sponge. I can't make out what goes on within him on these occasions. There is a good deal of cruelty in love; and he himself hates to be washed. Perhaps he is wrapt in fancies and wants to see his sweetheart rise daily from the waves, like Venus Anadyomene. Perhaps it is merely his sense of duty: last Friday, in cold blood, he allowed Dirty to wait outside, on the step, for half an hour, until his mother came home.

Another of his joys is to see Dirty eat.

I can quite understand that. Here, as at her toilet, there is something worth looking at. The mother of my little boy and I would be glad too to watch her, if there were any chance of giving Dirty her fill. But

there is none. At least, not with my income.

When I see all that food disappear, without as much as a shade of satisfaction coming into her eyes, I tremble for the young couple's future. But he is cheerful and unconcerned.

Of course, there are also clouds in their sky.

A few days ago, they were sitting quietly together in the dining-room and talking of their wedding. My little boy described what the house would be like and the garden and the horses. Dirty made no remarks and she had no grounds for doing so, for everything was particularly nice. But, after that, things went wrong:

"We shall have fourteen children," said the boy.

"No," said Dirty. "We shall only have two: a boy and a girl."

"I want to have fourteen."

"I won't have more than two."

"Fourteen."

"Two."

There was no coming to an agreement. My little boy was speechless at Dirty's meanness. And Dirty pinched her lips together and nodded her head defiantly. Then he burst into tears.

I could have explained to him that Dirty, who sits down every day as the seventh at the children's table at home, cannot look upon children with his eyes, as things forming an essential part of every well-regulated family, but must regard them rather as bandits who eat up other people's food. But I did not feel entitled to

discuss the young lady's domestic circumstances unasked.

One good thing about Dirty is that she is not dependent upon her family nor they upon her. It has not yet happened that any enquiries have been made after her, however long she remained with us. We know just where she lives and what her father's name is. Nothing more.

However, we notice in another way that our daughter-in-law is not without relations.

Whenever, for instance, we give her a pair of stockings or some other article of clothing, it is always gone the next day; and so on until all the six brothers and sisters have been supplied. Not till then do we have the pleasure of seeing Dirty look neat. She has been so long accustomed to

going shares that she does so in every conceivable circumstance.

And I console the mother of my little boy by saying that, should he fall out with Dirty, he can take one of the sisters and that, in this way, nothing would be lost.

CHAPTER X

MY little boy confides to me that he would like a pear.

Now pears fall within his mother's province and I am sure that he has had as many as he is entitled to. And so we are at once agreed that what he wants is a wholly irrelevant, uncalled-for, delightful extra pear.

Unfortunately, it also appears that the request has already been laid before Mamma and met with a positive refusal.

The situation is serious, but not hopeless. For I am a man who knows how mean is the supply of pears to us poor wretched children of men and how wonderful an extra pear tastes.

And I am glad that my little boy did not give up all hope of the pear at the first obstacle. I can see by the longing in his green eyes how big the pear is and I reflect with lawful paternal pride that he will win his girl and his position in life when their time comes.

We now discuss the matter carefully.

First comes the prospect of stomach-ache:

"Never mind about that," says he.

I quite agree with his view.

Then perhaps Mother will be angry.

No, Mother is never angry. She is sorry; and that is not nice. But then we must see and make it up to her in another way.

So we slink in and steal the pear.

I put it to him whether, perhaps—

when we have eaten the pear—we ought to tell Mother. But that does not appeal to him:

"Then I shan't get one this evening," he says.

And when I suggest that, possibly, Mother might be impressed with such audacious candour, he shakes his head decisively:

"You don't know Mother," he says.

So I, of course, have nothing to say.

Shortly after this, the mother of my little boy and I are standing at the window laughing at the story.

We catch sight of him below, in the courtyard.

He is sitting on the steps with his arm round little Dirty's neck. They have shared the pear. Now they are both singing, marvellously out of tune and with a disgustingly senti-

mental expression on their faces, a song which Dirty knows:

For riches are only a lo-oan from Heaven
And poverty is a reward.

And we are overcome with a great sense of desolation.

We want to make life green and pleasant for our little boy, to make his eyes open wide to see it, his hands strong to grasp it. But we feel powerless in the face of all the contentment and patience and resignation that are preached from cellar to garret, in church and in school: all those second-rate virtues, which may lighten an old man's last few steps as he stumbles on towards the grave, but which are only so many shabby lies for the young.

CHAPTER XI

DIRTY is paying us a visit and my little boy is sitting at her feet.

She has buried her fingers in her hair and is reading, reading, reading. . . .

She is learning the Ten Commandments by heart. She stammers and repeats herself, with eyes fixed in her head and a despairing mouth:

"Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt not . . . Thou shalt . . ."

The boy watches her with tender compassion.

He has already learnt a couple of the commandments by listening to her and helps her, now and then, with

a word. Then he comes to me and asks, anxiously:

"Father, must Dirty do all that the Ten Commandments say?"

"Yes."

He sits down by her again. His heart is overflowing with pity, his eyes are moist. She does not look at him, but plods on bravely:

"Thou shalt . . . Thou shalt not . . ."

"Father, when I grow big, must I also do all that the Ten Commandments say?"

"Ye-es."

He looks at me in utter despair. Then he goes back to Dirty and listens, but now he keeps his thoughts to himself.

Suddenly, something seems to flash across his mind.

He comes to me again, puts his

arms on my knee and looks with his green eyes firmly into mine:

"Father, do you do all that the Ten Commandments say?"

"Ye-e-es."

He looks like a person whose last hope has escaped him. I would so much like to help him; but what, in Heaven's name, can I do?

Then he collects himself, shakes his head a little and says, with great tears in his eyes:

"Father, I don't believe that I can do all those things that the Ten Commandments say."

And I draw him to me and we cry together because life is so difficult, while Dirty plods away like a good girl.

CHAPTER XII

THIS we all know, that sin came into the world by the law.

Dirty's Ten Commandments have brought it to us.

When she comes, she now always has Luther's terrible Little Catechism [1] and Balslev's equally objectionable work with her. Her parents evidently look upon it as most natural that she should also cultivate her soul at our house.

Her copies of these two classics were not published yesterday. They are probably heirlooms in Dirty's family.

[1] *Luther's Lille Katekismus,* the Lutheran catechism in general use in Denmark.—A. T. de M.

They are covered in thick brown paper, which again is protected by a heavy layer of dirt against any touch of clean fingers. They can be smelt at a distance.

But my little boy is no snob.

When Dirty has finished her studies—she always reads out aloud—he asks her permission to turn over the pages of the works in which she finds those strange words. He stares respectfully at the letters which he cannot read.

And then he asks questions.

He asks Dirty, he asks the servant, he asks us. Before any one suspects it, he is at home in the whole field of theology.

He knows that God is in Heaven, where all good people go to Him, while the wicked are put down below

in Hell. That God created the world in six days and said that we must not do anything on Sundays. That God can do everything and knows everything and sees everything.

He often prays, creeps upstairs as high as he can go, so as to be nearer Heaven, and shouts as loud as he can. The other day I found him at the top of the folding-steps:

"Dear God! You must please give us fine weather to-morrow, for we are going to the wood."

He says *Du* to everybody except God and the grocer.

He never compromises.

The servant is laying the table; we have guests coming and we call her attention to a little hole in the cloth:

"I must lay it so that no one can see it," she says.

"God will see it."

"He is not coming this evening," says the blasphemous hussy.

"Yes, He is everywhere," answers my little boy, severely.

He looks after me in particular:

"You mustn't say 'gad,' Father. Dirty's governess says that people who say 'gad' go to Hell."

"I shan't say it again," I reply, humbly.

One Sunday morning, he finds me writing and upbraids me seriously.

"My little boy," I say, distressfully, "I must work every day. If I do nothing on Sunday, I do nothing on Monday either. If I do nothing on Monday, I am idle on Tuesday too. And so on."

He ponders; and I continue, with the courage of despair:

"You must have noticed that Dirty wants a new catechism? The one she has is dirty and old."

He agrees to this.

"She will never have one, you see," I say, emphatically. "Her father rests so tremendously on Sunday that he is hardly able to do anything on the other days. He never earns enough to buy a new catechism."

I have won—this engagement. But the war is continued without cessation of hostilities.

The mother of my little boy and I are sitting in the twilight by his bedside and softly talking about this.

"What are we to do?" she asks.

"We can do nothing," I reply. "Dirty is right: God is everywhere. We can't keep Him out. And if we could, for a time: what then? A day

would come perhaps when our little boy was ill or sad and the priests would come to him with their God as a new and untried miraculous remedy and bewilder his mind and his senses. Our little boy too will have to go through Luther and Balslev and Assens and confirmation and all the rest of it. Then this will become a commonplace to him; and one day he will form his own views, as we have done."

But, when he comes and asks how big God is, whether He is bigger than the Round Tower, how far it is to Heaven, why the weather was not fine on the day when he prayed so hard for it: then we fly from the face of the Lord and hide like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

And we leave Dirty to explain.

CHAPTER XIII

MY little boy has got a rival, whose name is Henrik, a popinjay who not only is six years old, but has an unlimited supply of liquorice at his disposal. And, to fill the measure of my little boy's bitterness, Henrik is to go to the dancing-school; and I am, therefore, not surprised when my little boy asks to be taught to dance, so that he may not be left quite behind in the contest.

"I don't advise you to do that," I say. "The dancing which you learn at school is not pretty and does not play so great a part in love as you imagine. I don't know how to dance; and many

charming ladies used to prefer me to the most accomplished ornaments of the ball-room. Besides, you know, you are knock-kneed."

And, to cheer him up, I sing a little song which we composed when we were small and had a dog and did not think about women:

See, my son, that little basset,
Running with his knock-kneed legs!
His own puppy, he can't catch it:
He'll fall down as sure as eggs!
Knock-kneed Billy!
Isn't he silly?
Silly Billy!

But poetry fails to comfort him. Dark is his face and desperate his glance. And, when I see that the case is serious, I resolve to resort to serious measures.

I take him with me to a ball, a real

ball, where people who have learnt to dance go to enjoy themselves. It is difficult to keep him in a more or less waking condition, but I succeed.

We sit quietly in a corner and watch the merry throng. I say not a word, but look at his wide-open eyes.

"Father, why does that man jump like that, when he is so awfully hot?"

"Yes; can you understand it?"

"Why does that lady with her head on one side look so tired? . . . Why does that fat woman hop about so funnily, Father? . . . Father, what queer legs that man there has!"

It rains questions and observations. We make jokes and laugh till the tears come to our eyes. We whisper naughty things to each other and go into a side-room and mimic a pair of crooked legs till we can't hold our-

selves for laughter. We sit and wait till a steam thrashing-machine on its round comes past us; and we are fit to die when we hear it puff and blow.

We enjoy ourselves beyond measure.

And we make a hit.

The steam thrashing-machine and the crooked legs and the fat woman and the hot gentleman and others crowd round us and admire the dear little boy. We accept their praises, for we have agreed not to say what we think to anybody, except to Mother, when we come home, and then, of course, to Dirty.

And we wink our eyes and enjoy our delightful fun until we fall asleep and are driven home and put to bed.

And then we have done with the dancing-school.

My little boy paints in strong colours, for his Dirty's benefit, what Henrik will look like when he dances. It is no use for that young man to deny all that my little boy says and to execute different elegant steps. I was prepared for this; and my little boy tells exultantly that this is only something with which they lure stupid people at the start and that it will certainly end with Henrik's getting very hot and hopping round on crooked legs with a fat woman and a face of despair.

In the meantime, of course, I do not forget that, if we pull down without building up we shall end by landing ourselves in an unwholesome scepticism.

We therefore invent various dances, which my little boy executes in the

courtyard to Dirty's joy and to Henrik's most jealous envy. We point emphatically to the fact that the dances are our own, that they are composed only for the woman we love and performed only for her.

There is, for instance, a dance with a stick, which my little boy wields, while Henrik draws back. Another with a pair of new mittens for Dirty. And, lastly, the liquorice dance, which expresses an extraordinary contempt for that foodstuff.

That Dirty should suck a stick of liquorice, which she has received from Henrik, while enjoying her other admirer's satire, naturally staggers my little boy. But I explain to him that that is because she is a woman and that *that* is a thing which can't be helped.

What Bournonville [1] would say, if he could look down upon us from his place in Heaven, I do not know.

But I don't believe that he can.

If he, up there, could see how people dance down here, he really would not stay there.

[1] A famous French ballet-master who figured at the Copenhagen Opera-house in the eighteenth century.—A. T. de M.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE is a battle royal and a great hullabaloo among the children in the court-yard.

I hear them shouting "Jew!" and I go to the window and see my little boy in the front rank of the bandits, screaming, fighting with clenched fists and without his cap.

I sit down quietly to my work again, certain that he will appear before long and ease his heart.

And he comes directly after.

He stands still, as is his way, by my side and says nothing. I steal a glance at him: he is greatly excited and

proud and glad, like one who has fearlessly done his duty.

"What fun you've been having down there!"

"Oh," he says, modestly, "it was only a Jew boy whom we were licking."

I jump up so quickly that I upset my chair:

"A Jew boy? Were you licking him? What had he done?"

"Nothing. . . ."

His voice is not very certain, for I look so queer.

And that is only the beginning. For now I snatch my hat and run out of the door as fast as I can and shout:

"Come . . . come . . . we must find him and beg his pardon!"

My little boy hurries after me. He does not understand a word of it, but

he is terribly in earnest. We look in the courtyard, we shout and call. We rush into the street and round the corner, so eager are we to come up with him. Breathlessly, we ask three passers-by if they have not seen a poor, ill-used Jew boy.

All in vain: the Jew boy and all his persecutors are blown away into space.

So we go and sit up in my room again, the laboratory where our soul is crystallized out of the big events of our little life. My forehead is wrinkled and I drum disconsolately with my fingers on the table. The boy has both his hands in his pockets and does not take his eyes from my face.

"Well," I say, decidedly, "there is nothing more to be done. I hope you will meet that Jew boy one day, so

that you can give him your hand and ask him to forgive you. You must tell him that you did that only because you were stupid. But if, another time, any one does him any harm, I hope you will help him and lick the other one as long as you can stir a limb."

I can see by my little boy's face that he is ready to do what I wish. For he is still a mercenary, who does not ask under which flag, so long as there is a battle and booty to follow. It is my duty to train him to be a brave recruit, who will defend his fair mother-land, and so I continue:

"Let me tell you, the Jews are by way of being quite wonderful people. You remember David, about whom Dirty reads at school: he was a Jew boy. And the Child Jesus, whom

everybody worships and loves, although He died two thousand years ago: He was a little Jew also."

My little boy stands with his arms on my knee and I go on with my story.

The old Hebrews rise before our eyes in all their splendour and power, quite different from Dirty's Balslev. They ride on their camels in coats of many colours and with long beards: Moses and Joseph and his brethren and Samson and David and Saul. We hear wonderful stories. The walls of Jericho fall at the sound of the trumpet.

"And what next?" says my little boy, using the expression which he employed when he was much smaller and which still comes to his lips whenever he is carried away.

We hear of the destruction of Jerusalem and how the Jews took their little boys by the hand and wandered from place to place, scoffed at, despised and ill-treated. How they were allowed to own neither house nor land, but could only be merchants, and how the Christian robbers took all the money which they had got together. How, nevertheless, they remained true to their God and kept up their old sacred customs in the midst of the strangers who hated and persecuted them.

The whole day is devoted to the Jews.

We look at old books on the shelves which I love best to read and which are written by a Jew with a wonderful name, which a little boy can't remember at all. We learn that the

most famous man now living in Denmark is a Jew.

And, when evening comes and Mother sits down at the piano and sings the song which Father loves above all other songs, it appears that the words were written by one Jew and the melody composed by another.

My little boy is hot and red when he falls to sleep that night. He turns restlessly in bed and talks in his sleep.

"He is a little feverish," says his mother.

And I bend down and kiss his forehead and answer, calmly:

"That is not surprising. To-day I have vaccinated him against the meanest of all mean and vulgar diseases."

CHAPTER XV

WE are staying in the country, a long way out, where the real country is.

Cows and horses, pigs and sheep, a beautiful dog and hens and ducks form our circle of acquaintances. In addition to these, there are of course the two-legged beings who own and look after the four-legged ones and who, in my little boy's eyes, belong to quite the same kind.

The great sea lies at the foot of the slope. Ships float in the distance and have nothing to say to us. The sun burns us and bronzes us. We eat like thrashers, sleep like guinea-pigs and wake like larks. The only real sorrow

that we have suffered is that we were not allowed to have our breeches made with a flap at the side, like the old wood-cutter's.

Presently, it happens that, for better or worse, we get neighbours.

They are regular Copenhageners. They were prepared not to find electric light in the farm-house; but, if they had known that there was no water in the kitchen, God knows they would not have come. They trudge through the clover as though it were mire and are sorry to find so few corn-flowers in the rye. A cow going loose along the roads fills them with a terror which might easily have satisfied a royal tiger.

The pearl of the family is Erna.

Erna is five years old; her very small face is pale green, with watery blue

eyes and yellow curls. She is richly and gaily dressed in a broad and slovenly sash, daintily-embroidered pantalets, short open-work socks and patent-leather shoes. She falls if she but moves a foot, for she is used only to gliding over polished floors or asphalt.

I at once perceive that my little boy's eyes have seen a woman.

He has seen the woman that comes to us all at one time or another and turns our heads with her rustling silks and her glossy hair and wears her soul in her skirts and our poor hearts under her heel.

"Now comes the perilous moment for Dirty," I say to the mother of my little boy.

This time it is my little boy's turn to be superior.

He knows the business thoroughly and explains it all to Erna. When he worries the horse, she trembles, impressed with his courage and manliness. When she has a fit of terror at the sight of a hen, he is charmed with her delicacy. He knows the way to the smith's, he dares to roll down the high slope, he chivalrously carries her ridiculous little cape.

Altogether, there is no doubt as to the condition of his heart. And, while Erna's family apparently favour the position—for which may the devil take them!—I must needs wait with resignation like one who knows that love is every man's master.

One morning he proposes.

He is sitting with his beloved on the lawn. Close to them, her aunt is nursing her chlorosis under a red parasol

and with a novel in her bony lap. Up in the balcony above sit I, as Providence, and see everything, myself unseen.

"You shall be my sweetheart," says my little boy.

"Yes," says Erna.

"I have a sweetheart already in Copenhagen," he says, proudly.

This communication naturally by no means lowers Erna's suitor in her eyes. But it immediately arouses all Auntie's moral instincts:

"If you have a sweetheart, you must be true to her."

"Erna shall be my sweetheart."

Auntie turns her eyes up to Heaven:

"Listen, child," she says. "You're a very naughty boy. If you have given Dir—Dir—"

"Dirty," says the boy.

"Well, that's an extraordinary name! But, if you have given her your word, you must keep it till you die. Else you'll never, never be happy."

My little boy understands not a word and answers not a word. Erna begins to cry at the prospect that this good match may not come off. But I bend down over the baluster and raise my hat:

"I beg your pardon, Fröken. Was it not you who jilted Hr. Petersen? . . ."

"Good heavens! . . ."

She packs up her chlorosis and disappears with Erna, mumbling something about like father, like son, and goodness knows what.

Presently, my little boy comes up to me and stands and hangs about.

"Where has Erna gone to?" I ask my little boy.

"She mustn't go out," he says, dejectedly.

He puts his hands in his pockets and looks straight before him.

"Father," he says, "can't you have two sweethearts?"

The question comes quite unexpectedly and, at the moment, I don't know what to answer.

"Well?" says the mother of my little boy, amiably, and looks up from her newspaper.

And I pull my waistcoat down and my collar up:

"Yes," I say, firmly. "You can. But it is wrong. It leads to more fuss and unpleasantness than you can possibly conceive."

A silence.

"Are you so fond of Erna?" asks our mother.

"Yes."

"Do you want to marry her?"

"Yes."

I get up and rub my hands:

"Then the thing is settled," I say. "We'll write to Dirty and give her notice. There's nothing else to be done. I will write now and you can give the letter yourself to the postman, when he comes this afternoon. If you take my advice, you will make her a present of your ball. Then she will not be so much upset."

"She can have my gold-fish too, if she likes," says the boy.

"Excellent, excellent. We will give her the gold-fish. Then she will really have nothing in the world to complain of."

My little boy goes away. But, presently, he returns:

"Father, have you written the letter to Dirty?"

"Not yet, my boy. There is time enough. I sha'n't forget it."

"Father, I am so fond of Dirty."

"She was certainly a dear little girl."

A silence.

"Father, I am also so fond of Erna."

We look at each other. This is no joke:

"Perhaps we had better wait with the letter till to-morrow," I say. "Or perhaps it would be best if we talked to Dirty ourselves, when we get back to town."

We both ponder over the matter and really don't know what to do.

Then my eyes surprise an indescribable smile on our mother's face. All

a woman's incapacity to understand man's honesty is contained within that smile and I resent it greatly:

"Come," I say and give my hand to my little boy. "Let us go."

And we go to a place we know of, far away behind the hedge, where we lie on our backs and look up at the blue sky and talk together sensibly, as two gentlemen should.

CHAPTER XVI

MY little boy is to go to school.

We can't keep him at home any longer, says his mother. He himself is glad to go, of course, because he does not know what school is.

I know what it is and I know also that there is no escape for him, that he must go. But I am sick at heart. All that is good within me revolts against the inevitable.

So we go for our last morning walk, along the road where something wonderful has always happened to us. It looks to me as if the trees have crape wound round their tops and the birds sing in a minor key and the people

stare at me with earnest and sympathetic eyes.

But my little boy sees nothing. He is only excited at the prospect. He talks and asks questions without stopping.

We sit down by the edge of our usual ditch—alas, that ditch!

And suddenly my heart triumphs over my understanding. The voice of my clear conscience penetrates through the whole well-trained and harmonious choir which is to give the concert; and it sings its solo in the ears of my little boy:

"I just want to tell you that school is a horrid place," I say. "You can have no conception of what you will have to put up with there. They will tell you that two and two are four. . . ."

"Mother has taught me that already," says he, blithely.

"Yes, but that is wrong, you poor wretch!" I cry. "Two and two are never four, or only very seldom. And that's not all. They will try to make you believe that Teheran is the capital of Persia and that Mont Blanc is 15,781 feet high and you will take them at their word. But I tell you that both Teheran and Persia are nothing at all, an empty sound, a stupid joke. And Mont Blanc is not half as big as the mound in the tallow-chandler's back-garden. And listen: you will never have any more time to play in the courtyard with Einar. When he shouts to you to come out, you'll have to sit and read about a lot of horrible old kings who have been dead for hundreds and hundreds of

years, if they ever existed at all, which I, for my part, simply don't believe."

My little boy does not understand me. But he sees that I am sad and puts his hand in mine:

"Mother says that you must go to school to become a clever boy," he says. "Mother says that Einar is ever so much too small and stupid to go to school."

I bow my head and nod and say nothing.

That is past.

And I take him to school and see how he storms up the steps without so much as turning his head to look back at me.

CHAPTER XVII

HERE ends this book about my little boy.

What more can there be to tell?

He is no longer mine. I have handed him over to society. Hr. Petersen, candidate in letters, Hr. Nielsen, student of theology, and Fröken Hansen, certificated teacher, will now set their distinguished example before him for five hours daily. He will form himself in their likeness. Their spirit hovers over him at school: he brings it home with him, it overshadows him when he is learning the lessons which they zealously mete out to him.

I don't know these people. But I pay them.

I, who have had a hard fight to keep my thoughts free and my limbs unrestrained and who have not retired from the fight without deep wounds of which I am reminded when the weather changes, I have, of my own free will, brought him to the institution for maiming human beings. I, who at times have soared to peaks that were my own, because the other birds dared not follow me, have myself brought him to the place where wings are clipped for flying respectably, with the flock.

"There was nothing else to be done," says the mother of my little boy.

"Really?" I reply, bitterly. "Was there nothing else to be done? But suppose that I had put by some

money, so that I could have saved Messrs. Petersen and Nielsen and Fröken Hansen their trouble and employed my day in myself opening out lands for that little traveller whom I myself have brought into the land? Suppose that I had looked round the world for people with small boys who think as I do and that we had taken upon us to bring up these young animals so that they kept sight of horns and tails and fairy-tales?"

"Yes," she says.

"Small boys have a bad time of it, you know."

"They had a worse time of it in the old days."

"That is a poor comfort. And it can become worse again. The world is full of parents and teachers who shake their foolish heads and turn up their

old eyes and cross their flat chests with horror at the depravity of youth: children are so disobedient, so naughty, so self-willed and talk so disrespectfully to their elders! . . . And what do we do, we who know better?"

"We do what we can."

But I walk about the room, more and more indignant and ashamed of the pitiful part which I am playing:

"Do you remember, a little while ago, he came to me and said that he longed so for the country and asked if we couldn't go there for a little? There were horses and cows and green fields to be read in his eyes. Well, I couldn't leave my work. And I couldn't afford it. So I treated him to a shabby and high-class sermon about the tailor to whom I owed

money. Don't you understand that I let my little boy do *my* work, that I let him pay *my* debt? . . ." I bend down over her and say earnestly, "You must know; do please tell me —God help me, I do not know—if I ought not rather to have paid my debt to the boy and cheated the other?"

"You know quite well," she says.

She says it in such a way and looks at me with two such sensible eyes and is so strong and so true that I suddenly think things look quite well for our little boy; and I become restful and cheerful like herself:

"Let Petersen and Nielsen and Hansen look out!" I say. "My little boy, for what I care, may take from them all the English and geography and history that he can. But they

shall throw no dust in his eyes. I shall keep him awake and we shall have great fun and find them out."

"And I shall help him with his English and geography and history," says she.

THE END

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